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SUBJECT: MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE - FOCUS ON
AFGHANISTAN

REF: A) MUNICH 19, B) MUNICH, 20 C) MUNICH 21, D) MUNICH 22

¶1. (SBU) Afghanistan was a primary focus of the February 6-8 Munich Security Conference (MSC). Criticism of Afghan President Karzai was a major theme in the statements and questions of conference participants. For his part, Karzai put a positive spin on developments in Afghanistan and ascribed the remaining challenges to shortcomings in Western engagement. In his remarks to the conference and in subsequent media interviews, Karzai criticized the West for civilian casualties and inadequate development and civilian assistance. Many conference participants spoke out in favor of a stronger regional approach, and several suggested that more troops were needed on the ground. Special Representative Holbrooke was widely quoted as saying that the challenges in Afghanistan were "much tougher than in Iraq." At a pre-conference event for German and American participants (held under Chatham House rules), the focus was also on Afghanistan. The discussion was somber, with a clear recognition of negative developments and the significant challenges facing the international community. End Summary.

Karzai Lauds Progress but Criticizes West

¶2. (U) At the MSC meeting devoted to Afghanistan, President Karzai opened his remarks by recounting the successes in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, including expanded transportation, educational, and health care opportunities. A large part of the vision for Afghanistan had already been achieved, he asserted. He argued that it was outsiders who had destroyed Afghanistan and therefore the international community had a moral responsibility to assist in Afghanistan's reconstruction. Karzai argued that the international community had not moved swiftly enough after 2001 to support Afghanistan, and this presented an opportunity for the Taliban to regroup and threaten peace and stability in Afghanistan today.

¶3. (U) Karzai argued that Afghanistan was not a "narco-state" because the Afghan state did not receive revenues from the drug economy. Karzai predicted a decline of 20-30 percent in poppy production this year. Asked about alternative livelihoods to poppy production, he reported that cultivation of roses and fruits were options but he added that the most important component in combating counternarcotics was to give Afghans "confidence for their future." On corruption, Karzai reported that the issue is being worked on, but he offered no

substantive policies or goals.

REGIONAL APPROACH REQUIRED

14. (U) Welcoming a regional approach to the Afghanistan problem, Karzai said that Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan are all faced "with the same struggle," and needed to work together along with China and Russia to fight terrorism. Special Representative Holbrooke described the situation as a "long, difficult struggle." He emphasized that Afghanistan and Pakistan had many common problems that could only be solved together.

COORDINATION MUST IMPROVE

15. (U) Karzai strongly criticized the lack of international coordination as one of the reasons why reconstruction efforts have been showing little progress. National Security Advisor General Jones said "we cannot afford failure in Afghanistan" and suggested that past efforts Afghanistan had been too focused on military security. Germany's DefMin Jung complained that it took until 2008 for NATO to approve a joint strategy for Afghanistan, even though NATO had been leading the ISAF operation since 2003.

ADDITIONAL TROOPS NEEDED?

16. (U) German Defense Minister Jung argued that troop levels in Afghanistan were sufficient, because according to a joint assessment with the Afghan government there were only 1500 violent insurgents in Afghanistan. On the other hand, non-German participants on the stage stressed the need for more combat troops. UK's DefMin John Hutton

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expected the additional U.S. forces to have a positive effect, but emphasized that the Alliance needed to deliver on the reconstruction side. Hutton stressed that "we are kidding ourselves if we think" that troops other than combat troops are necessary now. Sikorski chimed in to say (as he has in previous years at the MSC) that "one who gives without caveats gives twice." Canadian Defense Minister Peter MacKay also welcomed additional troops. He recommended using the "common sense approach" instead of the "comprehensive approach," which includes networked security and a regional approach. He also suggested tapping other countries' resources for more reconstruction assistance. Finally, NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer called on NATO allies to consider providing additional resources to the Afghanistan mission.

NELSON